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ABSTRACT

Through the use of a visual literacy process of instruction as an initial stage in perceiving and creating, beginning college art students can acquire knowledge and skills for completing successful drawings. This process includes the following steps: selecting a simple and familiar subject; studying the entire form of the subject; looking for big and small shapes on the form and studying the relationship of these shapes to each other and to the surrounding space; analyzing colors, details, and value areas; looking for line and texture; identifying a focal point; and considering movement and unity. This process has five major purposes: the production of more successful drawings, preclusion of imitation, disciplinary exercise, creation of a method of drawing from memory, and instruction on how to initially view a work of art. A bibliography and several drawings are included. (LP)

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Visual Literacy: Perceiving and Creating

(Working Paper No. 1)

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SP 015 556

Running head: Visual Literacy

Abstract

Through the use of a visual literacy process of instruction as an initial stage for perceiving and creating, beginning college art students will acquire knowledge and skills for completing successful drawings. These drawings will reflect the characteristics of unity, use of skills, and degrees of originality (imagination).

Visual Literacy: Perceiving and Creating
(Working Paper No. 1)

A study of student drawings from my classes generated this question. Why are beginning college art students successful with some drawings and unsuccessful with others?

My drawing experiments resulted in a belief and a visual literacy process of instruction for the above question. The belief is that the initial perceptual process is the key to the successful completion of an art form which will reflect unity, controlled use of drawing skills, and originality (imagination).

A review of the literature also revealed that artists through the centuries considered perception as the foundation of the creative process in the visual arts. Traditional Chinese artists (e.g., from the Sung Dynasty, A.D. 960-1279) did intense perceptual studies of nature before they returned to their studios to create landscapes from memory (Hart & Hart, 1953; Moore, 1979; Willetts, 1965). When Jean Dominique Ingres, a 19th century French artist, did not have access to drawing materials, he drew with his eyes (Goldstein, 1977). The artist-teacher Robert Henri,

during the 1920s in America, advocated and used periods of perceptual study of the model, followed by periods of recreating the model from memory in another room (Henri, 1923; Homer, 1969).

Art instructors have continued to emphasize the act of perception as a significant stage in the creative process of drawing. For example, Kimon Nicolaides (1941) regarded the use and practice of careful observation as an initial prerequisite for learning how to draw. Other drawing instructors have confirmed and enhanced the value of the perceptual process (Bro, 1978; Collier, 1967; Demery, 1982; Edwards, 1979; Hanks & Belliston, 1977; Kaupelis, 1966; McKim, 1980; Mendelowitz, 1967).

Proponents of perception have also added clarification to the important use of observation in the visual arts as well as in all areas of our daily experiences. Anton Ehrenzweig (1965) defined artistic seeing as a combined analysis of an entire subject and its background: the individual parts and their relationship to each other and to the total subject and to its surrounding space. For Rudolph Arnheim (1969, 1974), the process of perception can only be a mental activity. There can be no productive thinking without the activity of perception; moreover,

perception can only be promoted and developed in the art studio. The expert in observation is the artist who has the knowledge and skills for producing unity and imagination in mediated forms.

The preceding belief is a continuation and extension of the use of concentrated perception of a subject before becoming involved in the actual process of drawing. This extension is made possible through the following components that are coordinated with the belief.

1. Visual Literacy Process of Instruction. Developed as a result of the influence of Kimon Nicolaides, John Debes (1968, 1969a, 1969b, 1972, 1975), and from my teaching experiences, specific steps of the visual literacy process are suggested, not stated as a formula to be followed religiously. Instead, I hope that students, while using these suggestions, will add their own ideas to the visual process for creating successful drawings.
2. Composition. Emphasis is on seeing contrasts (e.g., big to small shapes, light to dark values, movement to counter movement). Emphasis

is thus on the universal elements and principles of composition.

3. Subject. The subject does not matter. The objective is to observe and recreate images from any kind of subject.

Visual Literacy Process of Instruction

An assumption is included for this visual literacy process of instruction. Students should have an understanding of composition. If not, they should acquire a basic knowledge of composition before proceeding to participate in the following steps.

1. Select a simple, familiar subject. (As you repeat these perceptual steps, gradually select more complicated and unfamiliar subjects.)
2. Study--at your own pace--the entire form of the subject.
3. Imagine that your hand is actually touching the entire form.
4. Look for the big and small shapes on the form and their relationship to each other and to the total form and its surrounding space.

5. Study the edges of these big and small shapes.
6. Look for any lines and textures on the form and its surrounding space. What kind of movement is created by these lines? Does the texture appear to be smooth or rough?
7. Study the one or more colors of the subject and its surrounding space.
8. Squint your eyes to see detail and value areas in every part of the subject's form. Are there light and dark parts present in the form. How does the light affect the parts of the form?
9. Does the subject appear to have balance? Does one side of the subject equal to its other side in terms of the arrangement of inner space and shapes?
10. Does each part of the sides appear to relate to another part and to the total form?
11. Does the form have a focal point? Is there a major area of emphasis?
12. Is there rhythmic movement in or on the form?
13. Is there unity between the subject and its surrounding space?

As a result of my art experiments, I believe that students can successfully use the preceding visual literacy

process as an initial stage of creativity before becoming involved in either of the two major approaches to drawing: positive contour and whole. Positive contour drawing involves the edge-by-edge, part-by-part way of creating a subject with a single or several lines. Whereas, whole drawing involves using one or more lines and value masses to create a general outline of a subject which is completed by the adding of detail to its major parts and total form.

My illustrations from experiments show both approaches to drawing: positive contour (Figs. 1-4) and whole (Figes. 5-7). The illustrations also confirm the preceding belief and use of the visual literacy process.

Suggested Insertion of Figures 1-7 about here

In addition, these illustrations can be evaluated by specific criteria which have been derived from my belief and from a search of the literature (Bradley, 1969; Hastie & Schmidt, 1969; Schinneller, 1978; Torrance, 1963). The criteria are unity, use of skills, and originality. Unity means that every part of the drawn subject will interrelate to another part and to the total subject and its environment, if suggested or

included. Use of skills refers to two possible characteristics. If the positive contour drawing technique has been used, the skillful use of lines in the final product will reflect a three-dimensional (solid) appearance. If the whole drawing technique has been used, the skillful use of lines and values will reflect a three- or two-dimensional (flat) appearance. (A solid or flat appearance is determined by the objectives and styles of the artist.) Originality refers to the visual qualities of the unusual, uncommon, rearrangement, combination, emphasis of shapes and forms, and a satisfying result, surprise. The illustrations show the qualities of three-dimensionality as well as unity and degrees of originality. That is, for and to each conscientious creator, the completed art work will display a degree of originality in the form of surprise--a satisfying result.

Thus, based on the preceding review of literature and my current drawing experiments with a limited number of students on a one-to-one basis, this belief/visual literacy process has been confirmed for five major purposes. It is a--

1. Solution to producing more successful aesthetic drawings.

2. Way of precluding imitation of the perceived subject. This visual literacy approach can enable students to recreate the actual subject into a kind of two-dimensional imagery.
3. Form of discipline which can permit perceptual creativity when drawing materials are inaccessible. That is--as with Ingres--the eyes can be used as drawing tools.
4. Method for creating drawings from memory, as advocated by traditional Chinese artists and Robert Henri.
5. Way of teaching students in art appreciation classes how to initially view a work of art.

Yet at this stage of development, more research is required for validation of the preceding process and purposes. As a result, my belief and visual literacy method will be formulated into an hypothesis which will be tested in two field studies using the quasi-experimental nonequivalent control group research design (Campbell & Stanley, 1963).

However, my current observations further indicate that the use of concentrated perception of a subject before becoming involved in the actual process of drawing cannot be taken for granted. For unlike the stereotyped

approach to seeing with word labels, this visual literacy process involves observing the familiar in an unfamiliar way, gaining knowledge and meaning, and learning to empathize, have feeling for the perceived subject. Most significantly, data from the preceding experiments disclose that through learning how to see successfully, students will learn how to draw successfully.

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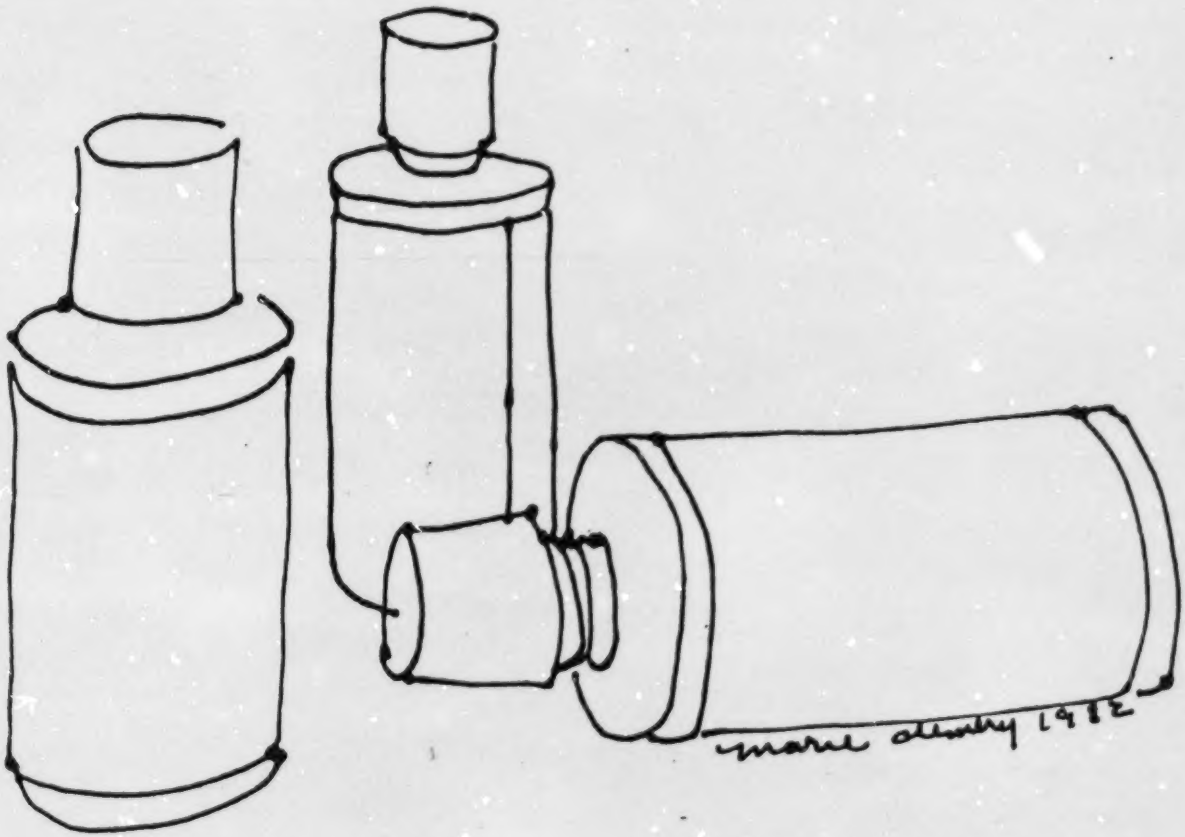

Fig. 1. Three Bottles. Expresso Pen.

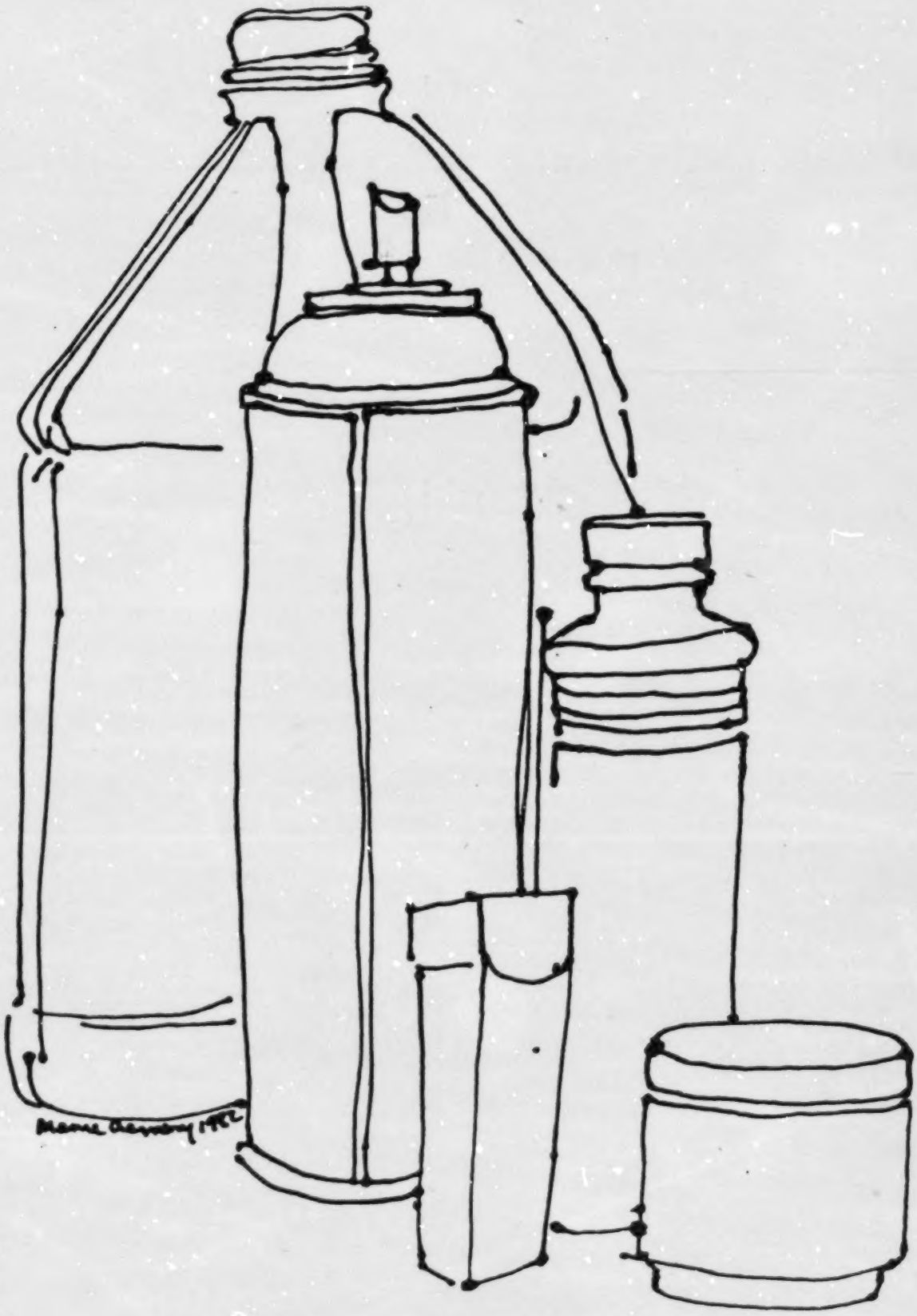

Fig. 2. Five Objects. Plain Pen.

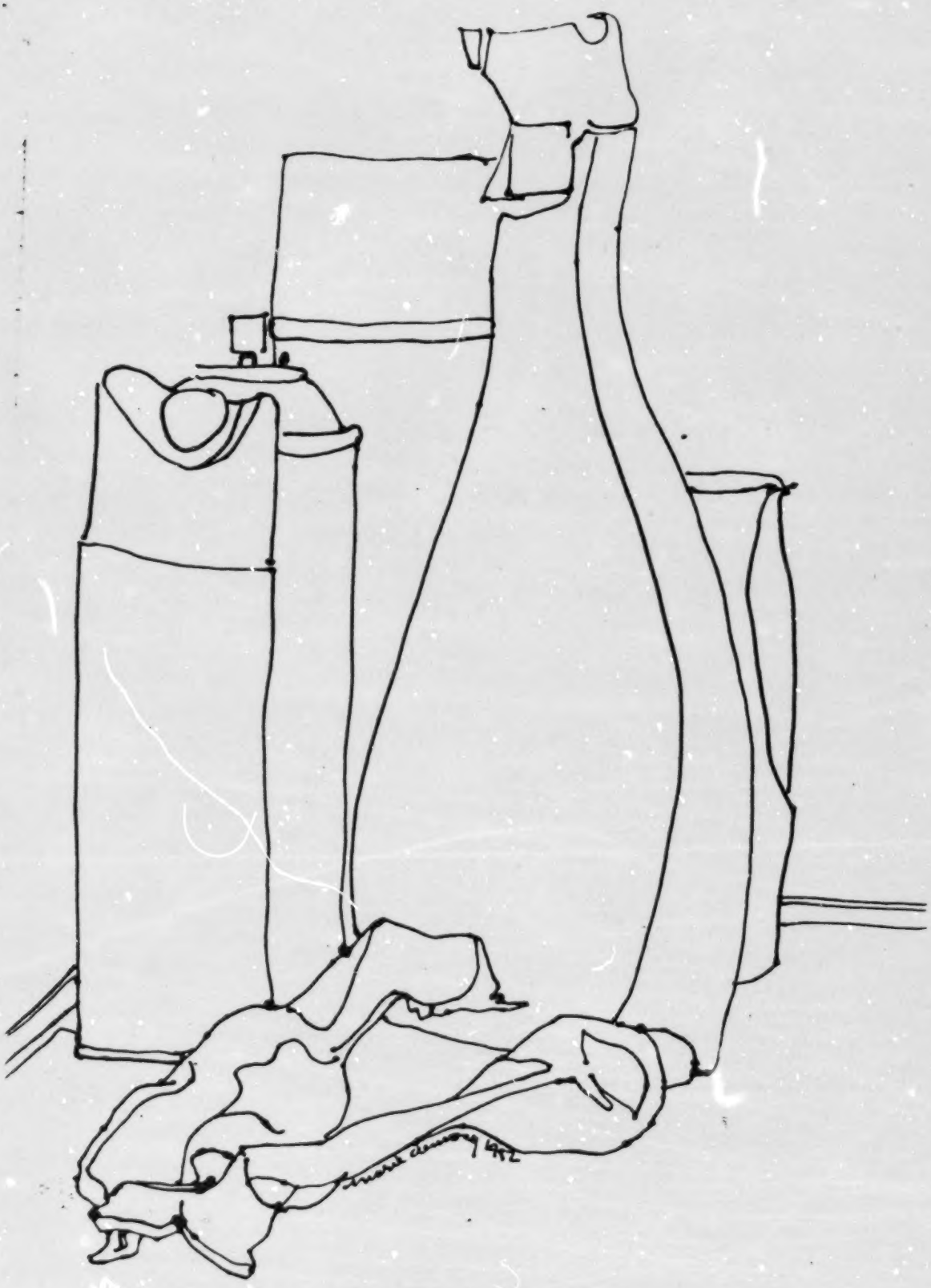

Fig. 3. Seven Objects. Expresso Pen.

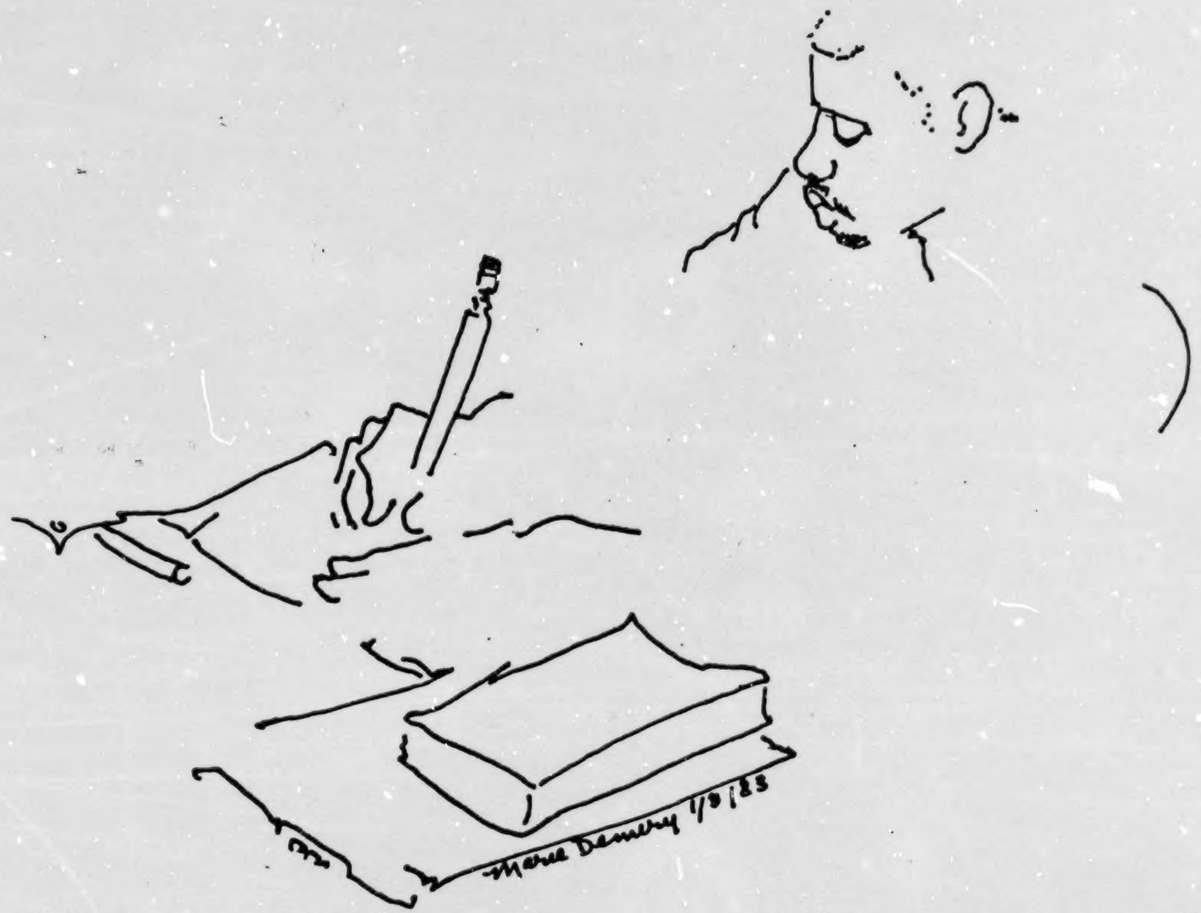

Fig. 4 Studying. Expresso Pen.

Fig. 5. Vincent. Conte Crayon.

Fig. 6. Jennifer. Conte Crayon.

Fig. 7. Jennifer. Conte Crayon.